jacobin.com

08.09.2025

# Europe Is Complicit in Israeli Genocide

AN INTERVIEW WITH
MARC BOTENGA

European states have armed Israel through almost two years of genocide in Gaza. While the European Union's trade deal with Israel is meant to be conditional on human rights, in practice EU leaders have turned a blind eye to its crimes.

European Union Commission vice president Kaja Kallas poses for photos with Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Gideon Moshe Saar prior to a meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on February 24, 2025. (Thierry Monasse / Getty Images)

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ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

Whole cities in Gaza lie in ruins. Israel has killed at least many tens of thousands of people. Starvation is widespread, and a growing chorus of international legal experts warn of mounting genocide. Yet, the European Union continues its preferential trade and research partnership with Israel through the EU–Israel Association Agreement — a pact which is supposed to be conditional on respect for human rights. Calls to suspend the deal are growing across Europe, yet EU institutions have so far declined to act.

Marc Botenga — a member of the European parliament for the Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB) and vice-chair of the European parliament's Left group — has been a leading critic of the EU's response to Israel's crimes. In April 2025, he and fifteen fellow legislators proposed a resolution on the immediate suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

In an interview, he spoke with Alexandra Gerasimcikova about Europe's complicity in Israel's crimes — and what the Left can do about it.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

It took a death toll in Gaza of nearly sixty thousand, United Nations warnings of "catastrophic hunger" and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) interim ruling of a plausible genocide, before the EU's Foreign Affairs Council moved to review Israel's compliance with the EU-Israel Association Agreement obligations. What was the outcome of this discussion?

MARC BOTENGA

It is difficult to fathom. All of us have been seeing the most horrible crimes live on our screens every single day for almost two years. Palestinians shot dead while lining up for food aid. Children being starved. Humanitarian workers executed at point-blank range. The ICJ, but also United Nations agencies and experts, and humanitarian organizations speak of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and man-made famine. Israeli organizations, like B'Tselem or Physicians for Human Rights, also concluded that Israel is committing genocide. The world speaks of genocide, yet the EU still needed a lengthy review to check if perhaps Israel might have violated human rights.

The conclusion of the review itself was self-evident. Yes, Israel violates human rights in Gaza, in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and is thus in breach of Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association

Agreement. The logical consequence should, therefore, be to suspend or cancel the agreement with Israel. Yet, neither the Foreign Affairs Council of June 23 or July 15, nor the EU Summit in between, adopted even the slightest sanction against Israel. They postponed everything until the next council meeting, which would normally only take place in October. No other country could get away with this.

The refusal to act confirms the EU's and member states' complicity in genocide, not just morally, but also legally.

Under pressure, the European Commission now proposed a very limited suspension of the participation of certain Israeli start-ups' participation in the Horizon Europe program. Once again, countries like Germany or Italy blocked this. The refusal to act confirms the EU's and member states' complicity in genocide, not just morally, but also legally. According to the Genocide Convention, states have to do all they can to prevent genocide. In regard to the Bosnian case, the ICJ specified that various parameters operate when assessing whether a State fulfills its duty. The first of these is the capacity to influence effectively the action of those likely to commit, or who are already committing, genocide. This capacity itself depends on several factors, from the geographical distance to the strength of the political links.

Clearly, Europe and its member states have massive leverage over Israel. Europe guarantees Israel weapons, money, and privileged access to the European market. We know Israel could not behave the way it does without the active support of the European Union and its member states, meaning inaction by Europe amounts to complicity. This is a genocide committed by Israel but openly sponsored by Europe in different ways. There are the weapons that go from and through Europe towards Israel, but also the public funds and subsidies from European programs that directly sponsor the Israeli military-industrial complex.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

The Association Agreement sets the framework for the EU's cooperation programs with Israel such as in research and

science, and preferential trade rules. Israel sells around €16 billion a year of goods to Europe, and Europe's exports reach up to €27 billion. This begs a question: would the suspension have an economic or political significance, in Israel, or at the European — and national — levels?

MARC BOTENGA

The main political message would clearly be that the decades of absolute impunity for Israel are over. Israel has been violating international law for decades. The ICJ, but also the UN General Assembly have confirmed this time and again. Today, as the ICJ clarified in July 2024, it is a legal duty for UN member states not to render aid or assistance in maintaining this illegal occupation. Therefore, by revoking Israel's privileged partnership with the EU, European countries would be doing the bare minimum to comply with their own obligations under international law.

However, the measure would also be relevant economically. Ending the duty and tariff benefits for Israeli goods exported to the EU would cost the Israeli war machine dearly. It would also open the way to suspend EU funding for Israeli programs and entities. The latest report from UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese highlights that the European Commission has granted over €2.12 billion to Israeli entities under the Horizon programme. This programme for research and development funds Israeli public military corporations like Rafael Advanced Defense Systems or Israel Aerospace Industries, and even the Israeli Ministry of Defense directly. Some Israeli-owned military companies are even getting funding from the European Defence Fund.

While Russia faces its eighteenth package of EU sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, Israel continues its two-year assault on Palestine with complete impunity.

Ending the privileged partnership with Israel also requires a military embargo. Not only is Europe still selling and transferring weapons to Israel, in 2024, the continent also massively increased its military imports from Israel. All this is feeding the Israeli genocide machine. That needs to stop.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

Did the conflict with Iran provide a reason for postponing action on suspension of the agreement? Or do you think that there could have been a different outcome were it not for the latest escalation?

MARC BOTENGA

Let us be clear: European leaders have guaranteed absolute impunity to Israel for decades and will use any excuse not to act. However, they are now feeling the pressure to do something. There is the international pressure, on the one hand. Josep Borrell, the previous EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, told me even before the current genocide that countries all over the world asked him all the time why the EU defends the territorial integrity of Ukraine, but not the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory. While Russia faces its eighteenth package of EU sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, Israel continues its two-year assault on Palestine with complete impunity, despite overwhelming evidence of war crimes and genocide.

Countries from the Global South see these double standards. South Africa has launched the case in front of the International Court of Justice. A group of countries from the Global South has launched The Hague Group to coordinate measures and sanctions against Israel. And European leaders might well eventually be judged themselves for complicity. So the EU establishment is under pressure to act in order to save some semblance of diplomatic credibility globally. On the other hand, there have been growing demonstrations and actions inside the EU putting pressure on governments. Hundreds of thousands have marched throughout Europe, over and over again, in support of Palestine. There has been a legal action introduced for failure to act at the European Court. People are mobilizing. Even Kaja Kallas, the current High Representative, has had to tone down her support of the Association Agreement.

In this context, yes, the EU establishment also used the illegal Israeli attack on Iran as a welcome diversion. Remarkably, the EU

reaction to these attacks merely confirmed its disdain for international law. While Israel clearly was the aggressor, European leaders turned things around and started invoking Israel's right to self-defense. Ridiculous. An aggressor state cannot invoke the right to self-defense.

The decisive factor was the strong, well-organized Palestine solidarity movement that has been growing and organizing for many years.

The German chancellor Friedrich Merz escalated the rhetoric claiming Israel is doing "our dirty work." This was arguably the closest any European state came to openly calling Israel a European proxy. Considering that the Israeli attack on Iran violated not only the UN Charter, but also the Additional Protocol of the Geneva Convention protecting nuclear power plants from attacks, and killed many innocent civilians and children in Iran, Merz' support for this full-fledged attack on international law shows the raw face of an EU imperialism ready to infringe all rules. European leaders are ready to even justify the killing of entire families. We saw this duplicity as well after the beeper attack in Lebanon. The booby-trapping of civilian devices by Israel was a clear violation of international humanitarian law. The attack left many civilians wounded or blinded, some children killed, others lost their eyesight. Volker Türk, the UN high commissioner for Human Rights, spoke of a war crime intended to spread terror among civilians, yet some mainstream European politicians called it "genius."

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

Belgium was one of the countries initially supporting the review, despite the new government dominated by nationalist and right-wing political parties. Belgium also took the initiative supported by a number of other countries to demand the list of possible measures from EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas. Can you explain how political forces united behind this call, and what role has the Left and its public mobilization tactics played so far in steering Belgian positions?

MARC BOTENGA

Belgium is a great case in point of how important mobilization is. The Belgian government is very right wing and composed of some of the most pro-Israel parties in Belgium. This is why in the end the Belgian government did not push for real sanctions at the Foreign Affairs Council. Yet, the Belgian government initially formally supported the review of the Association Agreement. The decisive factor was the strong, well-organized Palestine solidarity movement that has been growing and organizing for many years. This movement puts constant pressure on all levels of government in Belgium, from local to national. They regularly organize demonstrations mobilizing fifty to one hundred twenty thousand people, run campaigns for Belgian cities to cut ties with Israel, conduct direct actions, and more. The fact that the latest demonstration was the biggest of them all shows how the movement is broadening, and this is very important.

Of course, the Belgian Workers' Party is part of the movement. We mobilize for the demonstrations, expose the government's hypocrisy, or highlight concrete examples of EU complicity. The speeches, resolutions and legislative work of our representatives from the city councils to the European parliament always focus on how to serve and reinforce the struggle, because in the end, the balance of power remains the decisive factor. We call it "street-council-street." We want to put the movements' demands on the agenda within the institutions, but always with the objective to reinforce the movement in the streets.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

Going back to the EU, what structural and political problems do you see on the side of these European institutions like the commission and the European External Action Service?

MARC BOTENGA

The EU has proposed and imposed sanctions on a large number of countries throughout the world. There are eighteen sanctions packages against Russia. Evidently, it is not a lack of capacity. The problem is a lack of political will, sometimes hidden behind fake technicalities. Kaja Kallas hid behind a supposed need for

unanimity among member states to impose measures. That was misleading at best. Unanimity is not needed for measures related to trade, research, intellectual property, and foreign direct investment. By just stating there would not be unanimity if she proposed sanctions, Kallas was also trying to hide her own responsibility. She was always in a position to act herself. Yes, certain countries, such as Italy and Germany, oppose sanctions. However, the position of high representative is not that of a secretary passively taking note of the positions of twenty-seven member states' foreign ministries. She should act as a coordinator, pushing in certain directions. As a case in point: some countries also opposed sanctioning Russia and in that case Kallas played an active role in pushing them so that the sanctions could be adopted.

Last year already, I asked the commission whether it intended to exclude Israeli participants from the Horizon Europe program in light of the decisions of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The commission responded that excluding participants on the basis of nationality would amount to discrimination. When Russia violated international law by invading Ukraine, however, the commission did suspend cooperation with Russian entities in the areas of research, science and innovation, as well as all payments to such entities even under existing contracts. The European Union in the past also suspended projects or cooperation with Belarus, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Hungary. So why would it not be able to do the same thing for Israel? And indeed, by now proposing a — albeit very partial and limited — suspension, the commission frontally contradicts its own claim.

The suspension should have happened ages ago. Just check the long list of resolutions by the UN General Assembly: Israel has been violating international law and basic human rights for decades.

If we want to zoom out a little bit, the EU position on Israel has much to do with Europe's subservience to the United States. From Trump to Merz, Western leaders see Israel as a useful military

outpost – utterly dependent on their support — to destabilize and control the Middle East — a crucial region for energy resources like oil or gas and strategic trade routes.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

After years of efforts on the side of left-wing forces and civil society, the Irish government approved drafting of a bill to ban imports from the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. This makes Ireland the first EU country to do so. Belgium has also worked on proposals for similar legislation. Do you see such a bill passing in Belgium, and is it something you would support at this moment as a meaningful step?

MARC BOTENGA

Things are moving throughout Europe, thankfully, and indeed in Belgium as well similar proposals circulate. We as a party have our own of course. Unfortunately, the Gaza resolution proposed a few months ago by the federal government falls far short of what is needed — both in framing and in substance.

First, the resolution presented a distorted narrative. It all but completely erased the historical reality of seventy years of Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestine. This way the text deliberately omitted key facts: Israel's responsibility for the escalating violence, the documented war crimes, and the clear evidence of genocide. More importantly still, the resolution proposed hardly any concrete actions against Israel: no arms embargo, no state sanctions, no meaningful consequences whatsoever.

We are pushing for meaningful measures to sanction Israel and stop this genocide. However, when we proposed a text including concrete measures like an arms embargo, the majority opposed it. We do not need a resolution that serves as political cover — allowing Belgium to appear concerned while continuing business as usual with a regime committing genocide. Therefore, there is still work to be done. I hope the Irish initiative can inspire. It would not

be the first time Ireland plays this role. Let's remember how in 1984 the refusal of an Irish cashier, Mary Manning, to handle South African grapefruit not only led to the creation of a national boycott of South African goods in Ireland, but also reinforced the international anti-apartheid movement.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

Looking at examples of local politics in absence of national action, the Brussels parliament in Belgium passed a resolution in February 2025 that imposed sanctions on Israel. Can you say what the sanctions — and possible impacts — are, and how was the process to get there?

MARC BOTENGA

Our party managed to get a resolution approved at the Brussels-Capital Region that implemented a series of sanctions against Israel, primarily targeting arms transfers and trade with settlements. Brussels-based companies are now prohibited from selling or transporting any military or dual-use materials to Israel. The region has also withdrawn subsidies from Israeli companies and ceased funding for any entities linked to the military or colonization activities. Diplomatically, Brussels has suspended its economic missions to Israel and will no longer send official delegations as long as violations continue. These measures come with the promise of advocacy, with the Brussels government pushing these demands at both the Belgian federal level and with European Union institutions. The impact of these measures is significant, both economically and symbolically. It sends a clear message: states and regions can and must end their complicity with Israel. The Brussels Region is sending out a strong message: genocide, war crimes, and violations of international law cannot go unanswered.

This milestone was the direct result of months of mobilization by civil society and solidarity organizations, with demonstrations. Truth be said, in Brussels, this mobilization has roots that go way back. We called for the cancellation of a Brussels Region economic mission to Israel following Israel's 2014 war on Gaza already. A petition we launched gathered over eleven thousand signatures,

putting pressure on the regional authorities. In response, the Brussels government decided to postpone the economic mission scheduled at the time. In 2019, we again introduced a resolution in the Brussels parliament to cancel an economic mission planned between December 8 and 12 of that year. The initiative was broadly supported by civil society organizations and led to the cancellation of the mission by the Brussels government. So we had previous victories on which to build. In 2021, we tabled a resolution calling for the cancellation of future economic missions to Israel and the closure of the Brussels trade office in Tel Aviv. A majority in parliament rejected this proposal, but we did not give up.

Thanks to the mobilization, some things have been moving also recently. Civil society organizations managed to get a court order ruling that Flanders should stop transferring all goods that can be used in military equipment. And two Israeli soldiers that attended the music festival Tomorrowland were briefly arrested by Belgian police, before the Belgian authorities transferred their case to the ICC.

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

What does European failure to agree on a joint response to the events in Gaza in line with the rulings of the ICC and the ICJ tell us about the state of European democracy?

MARC BOTENGA

I think it shows the raw face of EU imperialism behind the rhetoric of human rights and international law. European leaders like to pretend their policy is embedded in universal values, moral imperatives or international legality. In reality, they only invoke these so-called values when it serves their geopolitical or the economic interests of its multinational corporations. Countries that align with or submit to Western corporate interests will get a free pass. Now that push comes to shove, we see that European countries do not accept the UN-based system and are not willing to comply with their international legal obligations. I don’t think anyone can credibly speak about “EU values” any longer, unless you consider

supporting genocide part of it. All of this also shows how little they care about how their people feel.

Historically, colonialism provided an ideological and material antecedent and sometimes blueprint for fascism.

More worryingly, the leaders of European imperialism clearly consider even the worst violations of basic human rights as acceptable as long as these violations serve their perceived interest. Crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are the most heinous crimes, but none of these blocked Kaja Kallas from calling Israel "very good partners". I want to go beyond mere legalistic considerations. The total dehumanization of Palestinians, but also of Lebanese, Iranian, or Syrian civilians killed by Israel sends a chilling message to humanity: your lives do not matter when European, or Western, economic and geopolitical interests are at stake. The colonial and fascist dehumanization of peoples endangers all humanity. The deconstruction of an international order based on common rules pushes towards a world of chaos and anarchy where only the law of the strongest prevails. At the meeting of the Hague Group, Colombian president Gustavo Petro warned how Gaza is an experiment: "They plan to bomb us all, at least those of us in the south, but they will [also] end up like Guernica, bombing themselves with foreign weapons. And that barbaric prospect obviously kills multilateralism, which allows nations to come together, kills the idea of global democracy, and kills all international institutions."

ALEXANDRA GERASIMCIKOVA

In Germany, anti-fascism is often shaped by the country's historical responsibility, especially in relation to Nazism and the Holocaust. This perspective emphasizes the dangers of authoritarianism, state violence, and racism — forces central to both fascist and colonial regimes. At the same time, many movements in solidarity with Palestine see themselves as part of a broader anti-fascist and anti-racist struggle. They connect their cause to global efforts against systemic racism and authoritarian politics today. What is your view on this connection?

MARC BOTENGA

I am not surprised to see that today many far-right forces are among the most enthusiastic supporters of Israeli policies and the Netanyahu government, just as many of them supported the South African apartheid regime and are still today denying the crimes of European colonialism. The fight against imperialism and colonialism and the fight against fascism and racism have always been intrinsically linked.

Historically, colonialism provided an ideological and material antecedent and sometimes blueprint for fascism. Fascist or similar regimes imported the racial hierarchies, the dehumanization, the indiscriminate mass violence, and authoritarian governance perfected in colonies to Europe, applying similar brutality domestically to maintain total control and oppress the working class. We do not speak about this enough, as European colonial history and crimes are routinely downplayed in the public debate, but colonial suppression methods inspired and molded fascist terror tactics. Think of the debate on how techniques and ideologies, such as the use of concentration camps and racial science, developed by German colonialism in Namibia subsequently influenced Nazi policies. Recently a French political journalist also launched a fiery debate on parallels between Nazi crimes against villages in France on the one hand and those the French committed in Algeria on the other.

The repression of Palestinian solidarity movements in Europe is huge.

But it is not only about fascist or far-right regimes. Even within the current political systems, dehumanizing rhetoric has made it to mainstream European political parties. European governments or local authorities import Israeli techniques of crowd control and digital surveillance into Europe. Israeli forces train their European counterparts. Weapons and military technology are sold to European countries with the Israeli stamp of “battle-tested” or “combat-proven”. In other words, we are importing technology and

equipment used for illegal mass repression and surveillance, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid. Sooner rather than later, these techniques will be used against workers, trade unions and social movements.

The repression of Palestinian solidarity movements in Europe is huge. I have just seen images of German police violently assaulting protesters opposing genocide. This is not unique to Germany. People are being arrested, and losing their jobs for speaking out for basic human rights. Fundamental freedoms, like the freedom to demonstrate or the freedom of expression are under fire once you criticize the crimes of Western governments. This is not new. Look at the police repression, harassment and censorship movements against the Vietnam War or in favor of Algerian independence faced in the West. Neither is this repression limited to the movement against genocide.

Unions are a core part of the broader fight against occupation, discrimination, and economic oppression. Let us not forget how in the past as well trade unions played a big part in global campaigns supporting self-determination, anti-colonialism, and anti-apartheid struggles. In several European countries, port or airport workers have refused to be complicit in arms exports to Israel. Trade unions have set up important international solidarity campaigns with Palestine. This has gone from public action to the funding of solar panels for hospitals in Gaza. The most recent Congress of IndustriAll Europe, the European federation of industrial trade unions, called for the suspension of arms deliveries and the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

In contrast, the UN Report "From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide" published in June shows how the corporations are benefiting today from Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. From Google to British Petroleum, Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet, and Caterpillar. These are the same ones exploiting workers in the so-called Global North. It shows how workers in the Global South killed and oppressed by colonialism and imperialism, and those in the so-called North fighting for decent living conditions

are facing the same enemy, the same governments, the same corporations looking to maximize their profits by obtaining cheap resources and labor. Europe should be at the forefront of the battle against genocide. There is the living memory of the Holocaust of course, and this year we also commemorate thirty years since the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, where the role of Dutch peacekeepers was widely condemned. And it does not stop there. From Namibia to Rwanda, European countries bear blame in several genocides. Every single time, the people said “never again.” Yet, our ruling classes are once again actively sponsoring a genocide.

This article was originally published by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation’s Brussels office.